

SHORT LOAN

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

PHILOSOPHY OF
LANGUAGE

Edited by
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and
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CHAPTER 3

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

THOMAS BALDWIN

DURING the first half of the twentieth century philosophy took a 'linguistic turn' (the phrase, which comes from Gustav Bergmann,¹ was made famous by Richard Rorty as the title of an anthology of papers in which this development is set out and assessed).² The first clear signal of this development was Ludwig Wittgenstein's remark in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) that 'All philosophy is "Critique of Language"' (4.0031), and this work by Wittgenstein (which I discuss in Section 3.2) remains a classic presentation of the thesis that philosophy can only be undertaken through the critical study of language. Thus during the twentieth century philosophical approaches to language, the kinds of theorizing now known as 'philosophy of language', have been developed in a context in which language has been taken to be a primary resource for philosophy, and as a result there has been a two-way relationship in which conceptions of language and of philosophy have been developed together. But one theme has been central: that language is not just the contingent expression of some wholly independent reality; instead there is an internal relation between the two. What remains controversial is the nature of this internal relation and thus of the role of language in our conception of reality. One

¹ G. Bergmann, *Logic and Reality*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964, p. 177.

² R. Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967.

common position, especially associated with logical empiricists of the 1930s, was that the traditional conception of a *a priori* truth should be reinterpreted as analytic truth, understood as the truth of a statement merely in virtue of the meaning of the words employed in it. Where this position is taken and analytic truth inherits the traditional role of the *a priori* in providing the categorical structure of our knowledge of the world, a linguistic version of transcendental idealism is implied. Critical discussion of this implication has been one of the central themes of late twentieth-century philosophy of language.

In this case the debate concerns the role of language in the context of metaphysical debates about idealism and realism. But philosophy of language has also transformed debates in other areas of philosophy, most notably epistemology and philosophy of mind. Questions about empirical evidence have been formulated as questions about the role of 'observation-sentences' and as to whether sense-experience has a content which transcends language, and these questions intersect with others as to how far language is the accomplishment of thought and feeling, rather than the expression of mental states whose content is independent of language. I shall characterize some of these debates below, but first I turn to discuss Frege's philosophy of language.

3.1 FREGE

In his book *Frege: Philosophy of Language* Michael Dummett claimed that at the end of the nineteenth century Frege initiated a 'revolution' in philosophy by making the philosophy of language the foundation of philosophy in place of epistemology, which had occupied this place since the time of Descartes.³ Although Dummett did not initiate the phrase 'philosophy of language', — see, for example, William Alston's 1964 book of this title⁴ — there is no doubt that by this claim he helped to raise consciousness of the philosophy of language and its importance. In thinking about it, one question is clearly whether philosophy needs a 'foundation' at all, and this question will recur in several contexts in this essay. But for the moment it is Dummett's claim about Frege's achievement which requires attention. For when one turns to Frege himself one finds nothing like Dummett's claim that philosophy of language is to be the foundation of philosophy; instead Frege's frequent claim is that by his work in logic he aims 'to free thinking from the fetters of language by pointing up the logical imperfections of language'.⁵

In fact this point is no great objection to Dummett, since his claim is one about Frege's achievement and not one about his intentions, and a way to see what Dummett had in mind is to consider the slightly paradoxical claim with which Frege introduces his first great work, his *Begriffschrift* (1879), in which he broke with tradition

³ M. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth, London, 1973, p. 665

⁴ W. Alston, *The Philosophy of Language*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1964.

⁵ From Frege's unpublished 'Logic' essay, probably written in 1897; p. 149 in his *Posthumous Writings*, ed. H. Hermes, F. Kambartel, and F. Kambartel, trans. P. Long and R. White, Blackwell, Oxford, 1979.

by starting from a truth-functional sentential logic and then went on to introduce first-order predicate logic with quantifiers. Frege writes here:

If it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare the misconceptions that through the use of language often unavoidably arise concerning the relations between concepts and by freeing thought from that with which only the means of expression of ordinary language, constituted as they are, saddle it, then my ideography, further developed for these purposes, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.⁶

Frege characteristically talks here of freeing thought from language; but in fact his method of doing so is precisely to propose his new 'ideography', his new concept-notation (*Begriffsschrift*), which is first-order predicate logic set out in an idiosyncratic way. So the contrast between language and pure thought turns out to be a contrast between ordinary language with all its misleading superficial similarities and the logician's analytic reformulation of the language in such a way as to make the underlying logical inferences transparent. It is this latter contrast, between ordinary language and a logically reconstructed language, which is going to be fundamental to twentieth-century philosophy of language; for the core of Frege's position is that logic, by breaking the domination of ordinary language over the human spirit, can liberate philosophy to explore the world unfettered by misconception.

This gets us some way towards Dummett's thesis. But Dummett had a broader claim in mind. He regularly writes of philosophy of language as 'theory of meaning' and his claim is that Frege had a theory of meaning which, whether or not Frege appreciated it, provided a new foundation for philosophy. What Dummett has in mind here is not Frege's logical theory but his theory of 'sense' (*sinn*) and 'reference' (*bedeutung*). The starting point for this theory is Frege's insight that the fundamental phenomenon of meaning is the expression of a thought by a complete sentence, and not the way in which words such as names and predicates refer to objects and properties. Frege singles out as one of his fundamental principles the principle that one should 'never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a sentence';⁷ so the meanings of words, including names, are to be thought of in terms of their potential contribution to the meaning of sentences in which they occur. At this point Frege introduces his next fundamental point, that the concept of truth is fundamental to an account of the meaning of a sentence; so the meanings of words comprise their contribution to the conditions under which sentences in which they occur are true. It is in developing this insight that Frege introduces his distinction between sense and reference. The reference of a sentence, he says, is that aspect of the sentence which is fixed by the objects and properties referred to in the sentence, and this, he says, is its truth-value,—its truth, if it is true, or its falsehood if it is false. But it is clear that this is not a complete account of the meaning of a sentence,

⁶ From the preface to G. Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, Halle, 1879, p. 7 in the English translation edited and translated by J. van Heijenoort, *Frege and Gödel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1970.

⁷ G. Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. Austin, Blackwell, Oxford, 1950, p. x of Frege's 'Introduction'.

since it is obviously not the case that all true sentences have the same meaning; so the conception of the sense of a sentence is employed to capture a further way of discriminating among sentences which differ in meaning despite having the same truth-value. For Frege, the way to make this further discrimination is to characterize the different conditions under which sentences are true, i.e. their truth-conditions. For, intuitively, although the sentences 'snow is white' and 'grass is green' have the same truth-value because they are both true, the conditions under which they are true differ: in one case, the condition is that snow is white, in the other case, it is that grass is green. So, it seems, as far as sentences are concerned, the sense/reference distinction is a distinction between the truth-conditions and the truth-value of a sentence.

But this notion of truth-conditions, which is central to twentieth-century philosophy of language, is tricky; for there is a sense in which all sentences with the same truth-value have the same truth-condition. Because snow is in fact white and grass is in fact green, it follows that 'snow is white' is true if and only if grass is green and 'grass is green' is true if and only if snow is white. This external, 'extensional', way of identifying truth-conditions is, however, clearly not what Frege has in mind. Instead he takes it that the sense of a sentence is given just by that account of the conditions under which it is true which is implied by the meaning of the words which occur within it.⁸ So the conception of a sentence's truth-conditions which captures its sense is a conception of these conditions whose specification is internal to the language and does not depend on extraneous non-linguistic facts such as that snow is white and grass is green. This point implies that for Frege there is a crucial interdependence between sentence-meaning and word-meaning. On the one hand, sentence-meaning is conceptually fundamental: the meaning of a word just comprises its contribution to the meaning, that is, the truth-conditions, of sentences in which it occurs. But, on the other hand, for any given sentence, the account of its meaning is dependent on that of the meanings of the words which occur within it. Furthermore word-meaning again requires the distinction between sense and reference. For while the truth or falsehood of a sentence, and thus its reference, depends only on the relationships among the objects and properties referred to by the words which occur within the sentence, the sense of the sentence depends also on the way in which these objects and properties are described in the sentence, and thus, as Frege puts it, on the sense as well as the reference of these descriptions. Frege illustrates his point with a famous example: even though the Morning Star is the Evening Star, the sense of the sentence 'The Morning Star is the Evening Star' differs from that of 'The Evening Star is the Morning Star' since the former, unlike the latter, expresses a remarkable astronomical discovery; so in respect of phrases such as 'The Morning Star' and 'The Evening Star' we also need to distinguish sense from reference.

As we will see below, this final point has been a focus for debate throughout the twentieth century. But that debate should not overshadow the other two basic claims which Frege introduced into the philosophy of language: the fundamental status

⁸ G. Frege, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, trans. M. Furth, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 1967, §32 (p. 90).

of sentence-meaning vis-à-vis word-meaning and the central role of the concept of truth in the elucidation of sentence-meaning. Both of these have been disputed and in recent years the second in particular has come under pressure (see Sections 3.8 and 3.9). Frege himself recognized that there was more to the meaning of a sentence than its truth-conditions, but he argued that distinctions of meaning which do not affect questions of truth, such as that between 'and' and 'but', should be set to one side, as questions of 'tone' or 'force'.⁹ Whether this is appropriate is a matter to which I shall return towards the end of this essay; for most of the twentieth century, most philosophers have accepted Frege's position on this matter. But I want to return to Dummett's claim, that this 'theory of meaning', or rather the very idea of providing a theory of this kind, provides a new foundation for philosophy. What Dummett has in mind here is that a systematic account of the meaning of language of the kind that Frege offers provides the basis also for an account of the content of thoughts: in a later work he takes it that this claim is the distinctive mark of 'analytical philosophy': 'what distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained'.¹⁰ In fact this claim is not exclusive to 'analytical philosophers': it is characteristic of Heidegger's later philosophy and equally of the writings of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, though I shall not pursue their approaches to it here. Nonetheless the suggestion that language is the fundamental form of intentionality, and thus that an account of the meaning of language is central to an account of the content of thought, has been central to much twentieth-century philosophy. Indeed one might well say that it is only through the recent development of alternative theories of 'mental representation' (functionalist, teleological etc.) that the domination of philosophy by the philosophy of language has been finally broken.

As I have indicated, Dummett acknowledges that his account of Frege's achievements is not one of Frege's express intentions, though he points to the fact that when, in the *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Frege turns to present his own account of what numbers are, he does so precisely by defining the sense of sentences, especially identity statements, in which number words occur.¹¹ But it is in fact questionable whether even Dummett's imputation to Frege of a 'theory of meaning' is appropriate, since Frege's distinction between sense and reference is presented by him, not as a systematic theory comparable to his theory of number, but only as an elucidation (*erläuterung*) of the basic concepts that occur in this theory.¹² Furthermore there is one qualification to the account of Frege given so far which does need to be introduced. I have described Frege's conception of the sense of a sentence as a conception of its truth-conditions. This is, however, a simplification of his position,

⁹ G. Frege, 'Thoughts', trans. P. Geach and R. Stoothof, in his *Collected Papers*, ed. B. McGuinness, Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, p. 357.

¹⁰ M. Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, Duckworth, London, 1993, p. 4.

¹¹ G. Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, note 7, p. 73.

¹² This point has been especially urged by Joan Weiner; see *Frege in Perspective*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1990.

for it omits his 'Platonism' according to which the sense of a sentence is an abstract object. The background to this is his use of a mathematical model for the semantic structure of a sentence whose reference and sense must both be objects of some kind. There is no problem here about the reference; for the reference of a sentence, as we have seen, is its truth-value, and this can be readily conceived as an abstract object. But what of its sense? How can its truth-conditions be an object? Frege argues that the sense of a sentence cannot be a physical object, nor, equally a psychological state; hence, he infers, it too is an abstract object, a truth-value.¹² But since this is to be a mode of presentation of the reference of the sentence, it turns out that this object is just an abstract specification of the conditions under which a sentence expresses the thought is true. So in the end the conception of the sense of a sentence as a Platonic thought is not in conflict with the truth-conditional account of it; but, equally, it looks to be an undesirable addition to it.

3.2 WITGENSTEIN'S TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS

I started this chapter with a reference to the conception of philosophy as 'critique of language' presented by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; and, following on from the previous section, one might well say that the position which Dummett attributes to Frege is really that of the young Wittgenstein. It is not surprising that there is this profound similarity, for Wittgenstein arrived at his position in his *Tractatus* precisely by simplifying and radicalizing the views advanced by Frege, whose work he praises in his preface. While retaining the fundamental 'context' principle that gives primacy to sentence-meaning (3.3), and the emphasis on truth in an account of meaning (4.024: 'To understand a statement means to know what is the case if it is true'), Wittgenstein denies that sentences are names. Thus he rejects Frege's Platonist conception of the thoughts expressed by sentences as abstract objects and instead reconceptualizes thoughts in a functional way as anything which provides a 'logical picture' of a fact (3). This then enables him to deepen the link between thought and language by maintaining that it is precisely language, with its meaningful sentences, which performs this function of representing facts (4). For sentences represent facts by specifying the states of affairs whose existence constitutes a fact, and since a specification of these states of affairs just is an account of the conditions under which the sentence is true, an account of the truth-conditions of a sentence, as determined by its constituent expressions, will reveal its semantic function, the fact which it purports to represent. So the truth-conditional

¹² Frege develops this conception of thoughts most fully in his paper 'Thoughts' (note 9).

conception of meaning fits neatly with the functional conception of the thoughts expressed in language.

Wittgenstein's conception of the sense/reference distinction is also a radical simplification of Frege's position. Where Frege assigns both sense and reference systematically to sentences and to their semantic constituents, such as names and predicates, because Wittgenstein denies that sentences are names, he denies that they have any reference at all. Nonetheless he holds that they do have a sense, though this is not an object of any kind but comprises instead their truth-conditions which identify the fact they purport to represent. By contrast, the semantic constituents of a sentence, which are primarily names, have a reference, the object they name, but no sense at all. Since the objects thus referred to by the names which occur in a sentence are the objects which combine in the states of affairs whose existence the sentence represents, it turns out that collectively they constitute the conditions for the truth of the sentence, and thus its sense. So for Wittgenstein sense and reference are mutually interdependent even though they are exclusive, in that no expressions have both sense and reference. Although this simplified account of meaning has obvious attractions, it does need to deal with the point raised by Frege in connection with our understanding of the expressions 'the Morning Star' and 'the Evening Star' which led him to maintain that names have sense as well as reference (see Section 3.1). Insofar as Wittgenstein addresses this point, he suggests that one cannot understand two names which are names of the same object without knowing that they are names of the same object (4.243); by itself this is unconvincing, but his references to Russell suggest that he takes it that Russell's theory of descriptions (see Section 3.3) provides a way of saving the appearances which suffices to provide an alternative solution to Frege's problem.

This is only a brief sketch of Wittgenstein's austere account of language. His conception of logic must now be introduced. For Wittgenstein logic is not just a way of systematizing valid formal inference; it is also integral to the representation of truths since true thoughts are logical pictures of facts. The association here is familiar from the case which Wittgenstein takes to be paradigmatic, namely sentential logic, where the theorems are tautologies and vice-versa. Wittgenstein generalizes this case to language in general, to affirm that semantic structure is just logical structure. Wittgenstein then adds to this two further claims: first, that the only kind of possibility is logical possibility, and thus that the only kind of necessity is logical necessity (6.375). So the traditional philosophical task of exhibiting and defending necessary connections, essential truths and so on devolves upon logic. But, and this is the second claim, because there are no logical objects (4.0312—Wittgenstein remarks that this is his 'fundamental thought'), this task does not lead to the identification of fundamental logical truths; on the contrary, because there are no logical objects, there are no logical truths. Hence there can be no 'philosophical propositions' (4.112) to express the logical connections that might be thought to capture the point of traditional philosophical claims about necessity and essence. Instead the only way in which logical points can be exhibited is by undertaking a logical analysis of the language involved which clarifies the concepts involved in such a way that supposed

necessary connections either 'show' themselves, or are undetermined, without the need for explicit statement of a logical truth. Thus philosophy is to be thought of as a therapeutic activity which employs a logical analysis of language to effect a critique, not so much of language as such, as of the typical misunderstandings of ordinary language which give rise to traditional philosophical puzzles. When language is understood properly it will be seen that the only substantive unanswered questions which can be formulated are 'scientific' questions: beyond science there are no further undiscovered metaphysical truths even though there remains the perennial task of understanding why the illusory appearance of such truths arises and thereby dispelling it.

It is easy to see why this conception of philosophy as, in effect, a logical philosophy of language was both captivating and challenging. In the present context there are a few further aspects of it to pursue briefly. The first concerns the structure of beliefs, desires, and similar psychological states. Wittgenstein takes it that the only structure available is that expressible in a truth-functional logic (5); but, on the other hand, it is obvious that sentences of the form 'a believes that *p*' are not truth-functional. Wittgenstein's remedy for this is the thesis that the form of 'a believes that *p*' is "'*p*'" says *p*' (5.542). This is enigmatic, but I take it that Wittgenstein's proposal is that belief has the form 'a's belief says *p*', i.e. that the appearance of non-truth-functionality is to be removed by treating beliefs as having a structure comparable to that of sentences so that they can be correlated with the possible states of affairs they represent in much the way that sentences are correlated with facts through a correlation of words and objects. This is not quite the view that beliefs just are sentences, but it implies that insofar as the mind involves propositional contents (believing that so-and-so and the like), it is at least language-like. Hence it implies that the philosophy of mind is to be based upon the philosophy of language. The second issue concerns the relation between epistemology and the philosophy of language. Wittgenstein says that theory of knowledge is just the philosophy of psychology (4.1121), and thus just concerns the question about the logical form of belief and knowledge which I have been discussing. This dismissive remark, however, does not capture an important implication of his approach, which is that evidential relations can only be logical. So his position implies that epistemology is just an application of his logical philosophy of language: it combines an account of the logical form of the sentences in which we ascribe belief and knowledge with an account of the logical relations between the sentence-like beliefs thus ascribed.

These points show how Wittgenstein's early conception of philosophy is critical of traditional conceptions of the mind and of the structure of knowledge. And yet he also represents himself as an upholder of ordinary language which is, he says, logically well-ordered just as it is (5.5563). Wittgenstein's resolution of this tension is that, despite being well-ordered, ordinary language often disguises logical form because its superficial structure has evolved for reasons which have nothing to do with logic (4.002). Hence the task of philosophy is non-trivial: logical analysis is not straightforward, as indeed Wittgenstein's treatment of belief exemplifies; nonetheless it is

supposed, in the end, to display the inferences which our understanding of our own ordinary language leads us to endorse. This resolution rests on the assumption that truth-functional logic captures not just one way in which the representation of facts can be accomplished, that which is appropriate for natural science, but the only way in which this can be accomplished. One of the main developments in his thought is his subsequent recognition that this belief is mistaken, and thus that ordinary language, so far from being answerable to the demands of this logic, shows us its limitations. (see Section 3.7).

3.3 RUSSELL

Apart from Frege, the other philosopher whose influence Wittgenstein acknowledged in the preface to the *Tractatus* was 'my friend Bertrand Russell'. By this time Russell had already acknowledged the impact of the ideas of 'my friend Ludwig Wittgenstein' in the preface to his 1914 Harvard lectures published as *Our Knowledge of the External World*.¹⁴ Indeed it is striking to compare the traditional approach to philosophy Russell followed in his classic introductory book *The Problems of Philosophy*¹⁵ which was written in 1911, just before he met Wittgenstein, with the 'logical-analytic method' recommended in these 1914 lectures. In the earlier book Russell begins by discussing 'appearance and reality' and ends with a sympathetic discussion of the possibility of speculative metaphysics; whereas he starts his lectures with the bold claim that 'every philosophical problem . . . is found either to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be . . . logical'.¹⁶

Most of Russell's previous work had been directed to the development of a logical theory which could vindicate the logicist thesis that mathematics is logic. As Frege's work shows, logic is inseparable from an analysis of language, so one would expect Russell's development of his logic to bring with it a philosophy of language. In practice, as we shall see, this is true; but it took some time for Russell himself to recognize this point because he initially regarded logic as a theory about inferences between propositions which he conceived as non-linguistic structures composed of the entities meant by words—'a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words: it contains the entities indicated by words. Thus meaning, in the sense which words have meaning, is irrelevant to logic'.¹⁷ Propositions, so conceived, are fact-like; indeed for Russell facts just are true propositions. Contemporary philosophers sometimes write of 'Russellian propositions', and it is this early conception of Russell's that they have in mind, whereby propositions include objects and properties rather than descriptions, psychological representations or abstract modes of presentation of them.

¹⁴ B. Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Open Court, London, 1914.

¹⁵ B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1912.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, note 14 p. 33

¹⁷ B. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1903, p. 47.

Although it was only under Wittgenstein's influence that Russell explicitly adopted a conception of propositions as representations, linguistic or mental, this change was anticipated by earlier developments in his position whereby his officially non-linguistic logic became irretrievably enmeshed with questions of language, especially in the context of questions about the logic of propositions which include 'denoting' concepts such as 'a man', as it occurs in the proposition that *I met a man*. When first discussing this case in 1903 Russell says that the proposition is not 'about the concept 'a man' which, he says, occurs in it; instead it is about a man denoted by this concept 'an actual man with a tailor and a bank-account or a public-house and a drunken wife'.¹⁸ This insistence on what the proposition is 'about' is, I take it, a way of saying that the proposition's truth does not consist in a fact about the concept 'a man' but, instead, consists in a fact about an actual man, even though this man does not occur in the proposition itself. In his attempt to capture this point systematically Russell says that the concept 'a man' denotes the disjunction of all men—Tom or Dick or Harry etc. . . .; but he does not have a satisfactory account of the way to get from this disjunctive 'object', as he calls it,¹⁹ to facts involving particular disjuncts in which the truth of the proposition consists. Not surprisingly, therefore, Russell swept this theory away in his famous 1905 paper 'On Denoting'²⁰ in which he returns to the issue he had previously grappled with. And significantly he now starts the paper by explaining that he wants to discuss what he calls 'denoting phrases' such as 'a man', and not 'denoting concepts' as before, so that throughout the paper linguistic con- cepts are prominent even though he still employs his non-linguistic conception of the proposition expressed by a sentence as the basic bearer of truth.

Russell begins with a brisk account of the truth of propositions expressed by sentences such as 'I met a man' in which, without argument, he introduces quantifiers and gives a substitutional account of the truth of the propositions thereby expressed.²¹ According to Russell this involves a 'reduction' of propositions whose expression involves the denoting phrase 'a man' to propositions whose expression does not involve this phrase, a procedure which, he says, 'leaves "a man", by itself, wholly destitute of meaning, but gives meaning to every proposition in whose verbal expression "a man" occurs'.²² Russell's main concern in the paper is then to extend this approach to the propositions expressed by sentences which include denoting phrases of the form 'the so-and-so' by reducing these propositions to the propositions expressed by sentences which start by asserting that some property is uniquely instantiated, so that the proposition expressed by 'The *F* is *G*' is understood as that expressed by 'There is just one *F* and it is *G*, where the truth of this latter proposition is handled in accordance with his substitutional account of quantifiers.

¹⁸ *The Principles of Mathematics*, note 17, p. 53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, note 17, p. 53.

²⁰ B. Russell, 'On Denoting', *Mind*, ns. 14 (1905) 479–93; reprinted in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 4, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 415–27.

²¹ Russell does not explain whether he took the idea of a quantifier from Frege, or from the Boolean tradition in which it was also employed, or thought it up for himself.

²² 'On Denoting', note 20, p. 416.

Having presented this hypothesis Russell attempts to argue for it against alternatives which he ascribes to Meinong and to Frege. His argument is notoriously difficult to understand;²³ but the details do not matter here, nor indeed does it matter whether Russell's position is to be preferred to that of Frege.²⁴ What does matter is the way in which Russell's theory of descriptions, as it has come to be known, contributed to the development of the philosophy of language.

The key to this is the thesis that, like the phrase 'a man', the phrase 'the man' is what Russell comes to call an 'incomplete symbol' because it is a phrase which 'has no meaning in isolation' in the sense that it fails to name an object which occurs directly as a constituent of the Russellian proposition expressed by a sentence in which it occurs. Instead the phrase indicates that the proposition expressed by a sentence such as 'The butcher is drunk' is one whose truth depends on the truth of a proposition obtained by making the substitutions specified by the quantifiers in a complex propositional function which is identified by the logical analysis of the original proposition. It is the negative claim here which is important, for phrases of the form 'the so-and-so', as in 'The butcher is drunk', certainly appear to be ways of referring to an object, a butcher, about which something further is then affirmed; hence Russell's theory legitimated the thought that the logical analysis of language can show that appearances such as this are deceptive, that surface grammar is not a sure guide to logical form and thus to the structure of the facts in which the truth of propositions consists. In part this is just an extension of the liberation from surface grammar accomplished by Frege in his *Begriffsschrift*; but because Russell's theory concerns putative referring expressions, its implications are more striking. It is surely this aspect of Russell's work that Wittgenstein had in mind in the *Tractatus* when, in order to substantiate his claim that 'All philosophy is "Critique of Language"', he adds 'Russell's merit is to have shown that the apparent logical form of a statement need not be its real form' (4.0031).

Russell uses this new theory in several related ways. In 'On Denoting' he uses it to suggest that we can have 'knowledge by description' about things with which we are not acquainted. This suggestion is made in the context of a traditional foundationalist epistemology which holds that knowledge has to be grounded in the immediate and infallible presence to consciousness of some self-identifying items with which we are thereby acquainted, such as sense-data. Because we are plainly not acquainted in this way with physical objects, this epistemology seems irredeemably sceptical. But Russell proposes that when we interpret sentences which appear to involve reference to physical objects in accordance with his theory, it does not matter that we are not acquainted with them; as long as we can have knowledge that there are physical

²³ See P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, ch. 6.

²⁴ In connection with Frege there are two issues to be distinguished: (i) Frege's treatment of definite descriptions as complex names; (ii) Frege's way of attributing sense as well as reference to names, including complex names. For a recent comparison of the positions of Frege and Russell, see T. J. Smiley, 'The Theory of Descriptions' in *Studies in the Philosophy of Logic and Knowledge*, eds. T. Baldwin and T. Smiley, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

objects related somehow to the sense-data with which we are acquainted, we can have 'knowledge by description' of the physical world. In developing this point, he suggests that this kind of use of a definite description involves a 'logical fiction', the fiction that the description is interpreted in accordance with his theory the putative reference to a physical object is eliminated and it will become clear that the proposition expressed just concerns the instantiation of some properties. This fictionalist application of a philosophy of language, which looks back to Hume, has become increasingly important during the twentieth century. But in Russell's case the situation is complicated by the fact that the properties involved in his descriptive analysis are typically properties whose instantiation requires the existence of objects just like the one putatively referred to. So although his theory of descriptions removes the appearance of reference to an object it does not remove the commitment to the existence of objects of that kind. But Russell takes a further step when he adds his theory of classes to his theory of descriptions: for according to his theory of classes sentences which include expressions which seem to refer to classes should be treated as abbreviations of sentences which just concern propositional functions, which he informally identifies with properties and with which he takes us to be readily acquainted. So in this case there is a reduction of classes to properties, and as Russell gets more confident about this logico-linguistic technique he develops the idea of a 'logical construction' which rests on the hypothesis that by introducing a language which replaces our ordinary talk of physical objects with apparent reference to classes of sense-data and their properties, and then applying his logical theories to this latter language, he can show that there is no need to suppose that knowledge of the physical world requires a problematic inference from appearances to some real but unperceived cause of these appearances. Instead such inferences are just to be thought of as inferences from actual sense-data to further similar potential sense-data. Thus by following his maxim that 'wherever possible logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities',²⁵ he uses his philosophy of language to move the goalposts for his epistemology.

This conception of a logical construction and of the reform of language will be important later. For the moment I just want to use it to elucidate an important disagreement between Russell and Wittgenstein. In the *Tractatus*, as I have mentioned, Wittgenstein cites Russell in support of his claim that the surface grammar of ordinary language can be misleading as to its logical form while also affirming that nonetheless in practice ordinary language is well-ordered as it is. In his 1922 introduction to the *Tractatus*, however, Russell attributed to Wittgenstein a concern, not with the logical analysis of ordinary language, but with the construction of a 'logically perfect language' whose structure would be completely transparent with respect to logical form and its relationship with the world. Wittgenstein protested to Russell that this had not been his aim; but one might at first wonder whether there is a

²⁵ 'The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics' (1914), reprinted in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 8, Allen and Unwin, London, 1986, p. 11.

substantive issue here, since Russell's logically perfect language might be taken to be just the result of a Wittgensteinian logical analysis of ordinary language. The grounds for Wittgenstein's complaint become clear, however, once one considers what motivates Russell's conception of a logically perfect language. For this is motivated not just by logic, but also by epistemology: Russell's aim is to characterize a language which has the means to express our knowledge of the physical world while satisfying his fundamental principle that every proposition we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.²⁶ According to Russell, an ideal language which employs the method of logical construction enables one to satisfy these requirements. But Wittgenstein did not accept any such motivation: as we have seen, his attitude to epistemology was generally dismissive. Hence he was deeply dismayed to find Russell attributing to him a position which implies that language should be adapted to accord with what he regarded as an extraneous and improper external requirement; for him, the critique of language is essentially an internal critique only.

After 1919 Russell radically modified his philosophy. He rejected the conception of acquaintance that had been fundamental to his epistemology and philosophy of language and he sought to develop in its place a functionalist theory of language that relies mainly on causation to fix meaning. He attempted, as we might say now, to 'naturalize' his philosophy of language (and mind) believing that 'we shall be wise to build our philosophy upon science'.²⁷ Because psychological theory then was somewhat rudimentary, he did not have the resources to develop the position in a persuasive way and, I think, only Frank Ramsey really appreciated at the time what he was attempting to do. There is no space here for a detailed account of these later, neglected, writings by Russell, but once one does investigate them one readily finds anticipations of later 'externalist' conceptions of mind and language.²⁸

3.4 LOGICAL EMPIRICISM

It is an important, and striking, fact that the group of thinkers who next took up and developed the positions advanced by Wittgenstein and Russell were scientists, the group of philosophically engaged scientists who gathered under the leadership of Moritz Schlick in Vienna and published their manifesto *The Scientific World-Conception*²⁹ in 1929. In this work they called for a programme of radical intellectual

²⁶ 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description' (1911), reprinted in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 6, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 154.

²⁷ B. Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' (1924), reprinted in *Logic and Knowledge* ed. R. C. Marsh, George, Allen and Unwin, London, 1956, p. 339.

²⁸ The key text is *The Analysis of Mind* (George, Allen and Unwin, London, 1921). For discussion of this work, see my introduction to the 1995 edition of the book.

²⁹ O. Neurath, R. Carnap, and H. Hahn, *Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung. Der Wiener Kreis*, Wolf, Vienna, 1929.

and social reform in order to implement a properly scientific understanding of the world. Although their programme had several sources, such as the ideas of Ernst Mach, they were clearly inspired by statements in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* such as that 'the totality of true statements is the totality of natural science' (4.11); and since Wittgenstein was at this time living in Austria some of them met with him for philosophical discussion. As well as the emphasis on natural science, they liked his account of logic and mathematics as 'tautologies' with no substantive truth of their own and, most of all, they liked his account of philosophy as just logical analysis of language. For right from the start they were emphatic in repudiating old-style metaphysics, with its pretension to provide knowledge of higher, non-scientific truths. Nonetheless they also differed with Wittgenstein on two significant points. While Wittgenstein had held that fundamental points about logical form could only be 'shown' through analysis of the use of language and not 'said', that is, stated as philosophical propositions, the logical empiricists, while accepting that the illusions of metaphysics often arose from the attempt to express these points as if they were claims about the world, argued that they could be sensibly expressed as statements about language itself, as an account of what Carnap called 'the logical syntax of language'. This move greatly enhanced the emphasis on language which one finds in the writings of the logical empiricists. The second difference arose from their primary concern with science, especially natural science. For despite Wittgenstein's claim quoted above about natural science, he was, as we have seen in Section 3.2, dismissive of epistemology and thus provided no account of the role of observation in validating scientific claims. The logical empiricists, by contrast, sought to bring their empiricist emphasis on the role of observation in science right into their account of language. The way in which they sought to do this was to maintain that there is an internal link between meaning and empirical verification: the Fregean thesis of the *Tractatus* that 'to understand a statement means to know what is the case if it is true' (4.024) becomes the verificationist thesis that 'understanding a statement and knowing the way of its verification is one and the same thing'.³⁰

These two points bring the position of the logical empiricists close to that of Russell, albeit with verification substituted for acquaintance. One indication of this is that, like Russell, the logical empiricists were not much interested in ordinary language; instead they wanted to construct, or characterize, a language which would be ideal for science. Such a language would gain its meaning through the empirical criteria by which simple statements are verified and falsified, and also through the rules governing the use of logical and mathematical terminology whose role is to facilitate reasoning and calculation, not to capture a special type of non-empirical truth. The task of philosophy is then conceived to be the detailed characterization of such a language: the emboldened philosopher will practise 'a strict scientific discipline, namely that of the logic of science as the syntax of the language of science'.³¹ But one qualification should be introduced at once. Once embarked on this project, it became

³⁰ M. Schlick, 'Meaning and Verification' in *Essential Readings in Logical Positivism*, ed. O. Hanfling, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 40.

³¹ R. Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1937, p. 332.

clear that there are many different ways of characterizing an ideal language, and this plurality of candidates gave rise to the question as to whether one should be seeking just one ideal language. In response to this there developed an interesting compromise: on the one hand, it was acknowledged that there can be a variety of languages with different logical systems which are to be assessed in a given context on pragmatic criteria, since, as Carnap put it, 'in logic there are no morals';³² but, on the other hand, as far as empirical concepts go, it was argued that primacy attaches to the 'physical language', the language which describes physical phenomena, as opposed to a 'phenomenalist language' which describes the contents of experience. We shall see below why the logical empiricists gave a special status to physical language; equally we shall see that the distinction here, between logical and empirical concepts, is one that comes to be called into question.

Several issues which are central to subsequent philosophy of language arise within the context of logical empiricism. One concerns the nature of non-scientific language. It was all very well to dismiss metaphysics as nothing but meaningless pseudo-science, but moral language cannot be similarly dismissed. The response of Ayer and others was to propose that this language is misunderstood if it is regarded as used to make claims, true or false, about reality. Instead this language needs to be recognized as a way of expressing feelings such as disgust or enthusiasm and of encouraging or prescribing others to act in certain ways.³³ This position gave rise to the 'emotivist' theory of ethics³⁴ which exemplified clearly one way in which the philosophy of language then dominated philosophy: the philosophical study of morality was the study of the language of morals. To some extent, indeed, this approach persists within ethics, or rather 'metaethics' as it is often now called. But contemporary discussions as to how far moral language is descriptive or expressive are now rooted not in empiricist presumptions but in debates about the role of moral judgements as reasons for action: those who hold that there is only an external connection between moral judgement and motivation treat moral language as descriptive of moral truth whereas internalists who hold that this connection is internal tend to construe moral language as fundamentally expressive of feelings and desires.³⁵

A different group of questions, rather closer to the core of logical empiricism, concerns the nature and limits of empirical verification. The question of limits arose from the critical rhetoric of the logical empiricists, that because the putative statements of theology and speculative metaphysics are unverifiable they are meaningless pseudo-statements which are at best expressive of certain feelings. For this clearly required a test of verifiability. Ironically it turned out that no sensible test could be devised and thus that by its own standards the question of verifiability

³² R. Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, note 31, p. 52.

³³ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Gollancz, London, 1936, ch. 6.

³⁴ This is slightly inaccurate: at the start of the twentieth century the emotivist position was worked out by the Uppsala School of philosophers, most notably Axel Hagerstrom and in the 1920s the position was also sympathetically discussed in Cambridge, most notably by Duncan-Jones. But the position had little general support until it was taken up by the logical empiricists.

³⁵ For a good survey of the recent debate, see M. Smith, *The Moral Problem*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994.

was meaningless; and with this the suggestion that meaningfulness is a matter of verifiability was quietly dropped.³⁶ A much more productive debate focused on the logical empiricists' records of observations 'protocols'. On one side of this debate was Schlick, who held that since observation is fundamentally a matter of individual subjective experience these protocol-sentences should aim to capture, in so far as this is possible, experiences of this kind. On the other side of the argument was Oscar Neurath who observed that Schlick's position implies that the meaning of a person's protocol-sentences is private to that person since this meaning is dependent upon experiences which cannot be shared. Neurath then argued that this conclusion is untenable, partly because it would undermine the possibility of providing an objective basis for scientific knowledge, but more radically because the very idea of such a private language is incoherent since language requires classifications and distinctions which necessarily transcend any individual speaker's application of them.³⁷ Neurath's discussion of this point is very brief, but prescient; I return to this issue of a 'private language' below in connection with Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language (see Section 3.7). Neurath's own conclusion was that protocol-sentences, the records of observation, must therefore be expressed in an intersubjective, 'physical' language; and that empirical inquiry is largely a matter of preserving the coherence of the protocol-sentences which stimulation of our sense-organs causes us to affirm with the non protocol-sentences which express the explanatory theories we accept.

Neurath was generally thought to have won this debate—Carnap, for example, changed sides in the course of it on the issue of the protocol language—but whatever Neurath's coherentist account of scientific knowledge was satisfactory remained disputed. Carnap discussed this issue in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934), and this discussion is especially important because of his account here of the role of the analytic/synthetic distinction in empirical inquiries. Carnap begins by accepting that there can be no question of simply inducing explanatory theories and laws from observations because 'the system of hypotheses is never univocally determined by empirical material, however rich it is'.³⁸ Hence, he argues, scientific inquiry involves 'conventions', the postulation of general rules which enable scientists to make predictions of protocol-sentences from hypotheses and thereby assess these hypotheses in the light of the protocol-sentences they actually affirm. Because of the complexity of scientific theories, however, this assessment is always provisional: there will always be ways of modifying a theory to save a given hypothesis even when predicted protocol-sentences are not confirmed: hence 'there is in the strict sense no refutation (falsification) of an hypothesis' (Carnap alludes here to Duhem's famous discussion

³⁶ The classic discussion of this point is C. G. Hempel, 'Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning', reprinted in *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays*, Free Press, New York, 1965.

³⁷ O. Neurath, 'Protocol Sentences', reprinted in *Essential Readings in Logical Positivism*, ed. O. Handberg, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 160–8.

³⁸ *The Logical Syntax of Language*, note 31, p. 320.

of this point).³⁹ How, then, should the scientist proceed? Carnap here introduces the analytic/synthetic distinction: the analytic 'L-rules' are the rules of logic and mathematics which are essential for the derivation of predicted protocol-sentences from scientific hypotheses and these are not normally called into question in the course of scientific inquiry even though their adoption is fundamentally a matter of convention. By contrast the synthetic 'P-rules', the hypotheses of the scientific theory at issue, are to be considered revisable in the light of observation, although, because of the underdetermination of theory by observation, no unique revision is usually implied and pragmatic considerations of 'simplicity, expedience and fruitfulness' will guide the development of scientific research.⁴⁰ Thus the analytic/synthetic distinction separates the scientific hypotheses that are up for assessment from the rules for inference and calculation which provide the background connections. Despite this role for the distinction between the analytic and synthetic, however, Carnap maintains that the distinction is fundamentally only practical: 'in this respect, there are only differences of degree; certain rules are more difficult to renounce than others';⁴¹ and he goes on to add, concerning an analytic sentence *S* that 'it may come about that, under the inducement of new protocol-sentences, we alter the language to such an extent that *S* is no longer analytic'.⁴²

Carnap's position on this matter fits with his tolerant attitude to alternative logics, since that attitude implies a willingness to revise one's logic. But it is one thing to revise one's logic in the light of progress in logical theory, such as Frege's insights into the need for quantifiers, and quite another to allow that such revisions can be justified by empirical discoveries (by 'the inducement of new protocol-sentences'). For, as Carnap here acknowledges, this implies that there is no deep difference in kind between the analytic truths of logic and mathematics and the synthetic truths of natural science. But without a difference in kind here, the presumption that the philosophy of language provides a warrant for treating certain truths as distinctively non-empirical and necessary because they are analytic 'tautologies' whose truth arises merely from the meaning of the logical words which occur within them is undermined. Once the meaning of our logical vocabulary is regarded as answerable to empirical investigations, a logic-based philosophy of language offers no basis for *a priori* necessity and, more generally, no longer provides a foundation for scientific inquiry.

3.5 QUINE

The philosopher who grasped the significance of this aspect of Carnap's position was his American disciple, Willard van Quine, who had worked with Carnap on the English translation of *The Logical Syntax of Language*. In his famous paper 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' in which he attacks the 'dogma' that there is a difference of

³⁹ *The Logical Syntax of Language*, note 31, p. 320.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

kind between analytic and synthetic truths Quine presented his position as if for this reason alone it involved a radical critique of logical empiricism.⁴³ As Quine knew perfectly well, however, this dogma had not been Carnap's position in *The Logical Syntax of Language*. Nonetheless there was a genuine disagreement between them, arising from Quine's willingness to think through the implications of this new thoroughgoing empiricism. An important instance of this concerned the role of linguistic convention. Carnap, like other logical empiricists, held that the adoption of a system of logic is fundamentally a matter of linguistic convention, so that logical truth is truth by convention, even if these conventions are revisable in the light of empirical investigations. Quine observed, however, that the logical implications of a logical truth cannot themselves be a matter of linguistic convention, on pain of requiring an infinite number of such conventions, and thus that the role of convention in logic can amount at most to the adoption of certain fundamental principles.⁴⁴ And he further argued that once these conventions are acknowledged to be vulnerable to empirical investigations, it is a mistake to think of logical truth as 'truth by convention' at all; instead we should recognize that 'conventionality is a passing trait, significant at the moving front of science but useless in classifying sentences behind the lines. It is a trait of events and not of sentences.'⁴⁵

Despite this disengagement from the voluntarist aspect of logical empiricism, however, Quine's empiricism is very much in accord with its linguistic aspect. Thus his account of the evidence for science is couched in terms of the role of 'observation sentences', which are the old 'protocol-sentences' under a new name. Furthermore, despite the fact he holds that logic is revisable in the light of empirical inquiries, Quine (who was a distinguished logician) still assigns logic a central place in his philosophy of language. For example, he holds that questions of ontology are dependent on questions of logic since 'to be is to be the value of a variable'—that is, the ontological commitments of a theory are dependent on its logical structure since they concern the kinds of thing whose existence is logically required for the truth of the theory. This position requires a way of making logical structure explicit, and for Quine this end is achieved by 'regimenting' the theory in a 'canonical notation' (a version of the logical empiricists' ideal language) which does justice to all the scientific implications of the theory. Quite what these implications are may well be disputed, but it is an important implication of Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction that scientific disputes cannot be divorced from disputes about the appropriateness or not of a notation or language. A case in point concerns psychology and the attribution of propositional attitudes such as belief. Because Quine holds that from a scientific standpoint there is no substance to

⁴³ W. V. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' in *From a Logical Point of View*, Harper Row, New York, 1953, 1953.
⁴⁴ W. V. Quine, 'Truth by Convention' (1936), reprinted in *The Ways of Paradox*, Random House, New York, 1966, esp. pp. 96-8.
⁴⁵ W. V. Quine, 'Carnap and Logical Truth' (1954), reprinted in *The Ways of Paradox*, Random House, New York, 1966, p. 112.
⁴⁶ W. V. Quine, 'On What There Is' in *From a Logical Point of View*, Harper Row, New York, 1953, p. 15.

talk of beliefs, he denies that a canonical notation for psychology needs to include existentially quantified variables whose values are beliefs or their contents. Many will disagree with Quine on this issue, but whichever side one takes on this debate, however, the point to grasp here is that for Quine, the choice of theory is inseparable from the choice of language, as Quine indicates clearly: 'If we are limning the true and ultimate structure of reality, the canonical scheme for us is the austere scheme that knows no quotation but direct quotation and no propositional attitudes but only the physical constitution and behaviour of organisms. . . . If we are venturing to formulate the fundamental laws of a branch of science, however tentatively, this austere idiom is again likely to be the one that suits.'⁴⁷

Yet Quine is also responsible for a sceptical argument which calls into question the significance of questions about language. This is his argument for the essential 'indeterminacy of translation', whose conclusion is that in disputes about translation or meaning, there is no 'objective matter to be right or wrong about'.⁴⁸ The starting point for this sceptical conclusion is the application of his all-embracing empiricism to questions about meaning. Quine holds that these questions are best conceived as questions about the way in which translation from a foreign language into one's own language is to be achieved; but he argues that the empirical evidence available to us when we seek to do this is so inadequate that it radically underdetermines the choice between competing ways of translating the foreign language. The evidence will comprise observations of the behaviour of native speakers, consisting primarily but not exclusively of observations of their linguistic behaviour, and also observations of their environment and interactions with it and each other. But, Quine argues, if we make different assumptions about what native speakers perceive, believe, want and are trying to do, we can match this evidence to quite different translations of individual statements by making compensating adjustments throughout schemes of translation. In effect, Quine is here applying to linguistic theory Duhem's general point about the underdetermination of theory by empirical evidence (see §5) except that Quine extends Duhem's thesis by arguing that it applies however much evidence is adduced. Quine then infers from this that questions about the meaning of individual utterances are radically indeterminate. Although their meaning is determinate relative to a scheme of translation which makes good sense overall of a speaker's behaviour, because there is an ineliminable plurality of workable but incompatible schemes, when considered by themselves utterances have no determinate meaning. Hence, he concludes, the question of what a speaker means on some occasion lacks objective truth. So when seeking scientific explanations of behaviour it is a mistake to employ a psychology which attributes meanings to the utterances of speakers. Further, since the attribution of beliefs and other propositional attitudes to agents is dependent upon the attribution of meaning to their utterances, these also lack objective truth. So it is equally a mistake to invoke these attitudes in a

⁴⁷ W. V. Quine, *Word and Object*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1960, p. 221.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, note 47, p. 73.

scientific psychology—which explains Quine's position on this matter, encountered

just above.

Not surprisingly, this argument has attracted a good deal of criticism. Some critics reject the underdetermination thesis, arguing that once the presuppositions inherent in the enterprise of understanding others and the implications of syntax are taken into account a pragmatic choice between competing schemes of translation can usually be made on empirical criteria in much the way that a choice between competing physical theories can be made. In both cases, where the evidence is insufficient, the choice of scheme or theory is indeed underdetermined; but this should be regarded as a challenge which demands further empirical investigation and not as a proof, in the case of linguistic theory, that questions about meaning and translation are inherently non-empirical. Other critics reject Quine's move from the underdetermination thesis, which is essentially epistemological, to the metaphysical thesis that meaning itself is radically indeterminate, which is a form of sceptical antirealism about meaning and content. These critics note that in physics Quine does not endorse a similar conclusion; instead he holds that because physical theory gives an ineliminable explanatory role to unobserved entities a lack of decisive evidence here for choosing one theory rather than another does not warrant an antirealist attitude to the postulation of such entities. Thus one issue within psychology and linguistics is whether there are grounds within these sciences for assigning an explanatory role to contents and meanings; if there are such grounds, then, contrary to the way in which Quine presents the matter, a realist attitude to meaning and content remains consistent with this sceptical epistemological considerations. So at this point the issue becomes one as to whether there are good independent reasons for preferring Quine's austere behaviourist psychology to psychological theories which draw on contents and meanings to account for behaviour, including speech. Current cognitive science and our ordinary ways of understanding each other strongly suggest that content and meaning do have explanatory roles. But one question here is whether these explanatory roles can be incorporated into the framework of natural science which includes physics and its laws of nature, or whether they belong within a different 'hermeneutic' mode of inquiry in which we make sense of each other as rational agents rather than as physical organisms. For if there is a genuine opposition here, one might acknowledge that Quine was right to hold that meanings and propositional attitudes do not belong within the realist ontology of natural science while still defending the objectivity of meaning in the light of the possibility of hermeneutic inquiries which provide empirically determinate conclusions about meaning.

3.6 DAVIDSON (AND DUMMETT)

This last suggestion, which harks back to nineteenth century German debates about the status of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, was especially championed by Quine's pupil, Donald Davidson, who argued that the demands of rationality and intelligibility

imply that mind and language are 'anomalous', in the sense that these indefinitely pervasive aspects of thought and language cannot be accommodated within the strict laws of natural science.⁴⁹ But far from abjuring the approach to the philosophy of language which I have so far been discussing, which might well be thought to bring with it the presumption that the study of language belongs with natural science, Davidson developed his alternative position which rejects this presumption in the context of a philosophy of language which deliberately brings together elements from this approach, starting with the Fregean thesis that 'meaning is truth-conditions'.

Since this thesis has to be combined with the familiar point that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of the words which occur within it it is natural to suppose there needs to be a fundamental theory of word meaning, a theory of reference, which generates specifications of the truth-conditions of sentences in terms of the objects and properties referred to by the words which occur within them. Indeed as we saw in Section 3.1 some such presumption seems essential if one is to be able to identify that account of the truth-conditions of a sentence which gives its meaning, since truth-conditions by themselves are much too coarse-grained to constitute meanings. Davidson's insight, however, was to see that this presumption is not in fact necessary, in that the work done by the theory of reference could actually be subsumed within the construction of a theory about truth-conditions. The person whose work he appropriated to this end was Alfred Tarski, a Polish logician whose work was closely associated with the logical empiricist programme. Tarski developed a way of 'defining' truth for a language by providing a recursive specification of truth-conditions for each sentence of the language. For Tarski this was a way of defining truth in terms of meaning, since he took it that these metalinguistic specifications of the truth-conditions of sentences of an object-language had to satisfy the requirement that the sentence in the metalanguage was a translation of the sentence in the object-language. Davidson, however, proposed that the direction of explanation here be reversed: that truth be taken as fundamental, and that the meaning of a sentence be defined as that account of its truth-conditions which is generated by an adequate theory of truth, where adequacy is assessed without invoking presumptions about the meaning of sentences or the reference of terms within them.⁵⁰

How, then, is adequacy to be defined? Here Davidson took over from Quine the idea of coming to understand, or interpret, as he calls it, a previously unknown language by observing the speakers of the language. Davidson's proposal was that we can model the strategy of a linguist in this situation by thinking of her as attempting to construct a systematic account of the truth-conditions of the sentences of the language, a 'theory of truth', which takes account of the structure of these sentences. Although the linguist has to start with guesswork—tentatively, assigning meanings (referents) to words and phrases in the light of her observations of the contexts in

⁴⁹ See Davidson's 1970 paper 'Mental Events', reprinted in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980.

⁵⁰ Davidson first presented this position in his 1967 paper 'Truth and Meaning', reprinted in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984. His best statement of it is his 1973 paper 'Radical Interpretation', also reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.

which native speakers use simple sentences in which these words occur—Davidson argues that she has two unavoidable but legitimate presumptions to guide the development of her theory of truth: 'charity'—the presumption that, by and large, native utterances are true, insofar as they include some truth claim, as most utterances do; and 'humanity'—the presumption that the natives are generally rational, and thus that the interpretation of their utterances should lead to the imputation of perceptions, beliefs and desires which take account of the observable environment and show how their behaviour is motivated action. Davidson then claims that the combination of these two presumptions with the holistic requirement that the linguist's theory should yield plausible truth-conditions for all the sentences of the language suffices for the adequacy of the resulting theory. These conditions capture all the evidential resources that are available to us as we come to understand each other and, Davidson argues, there is no reason to think that there is any inescapable indeterminacy in the application of this procedure even though of course in some cases our actual evidence may be insufficient.⁵¹ For this reason, even though we do not construct a theory of this kind as we interpret others, a theory of truth which satisfies these requirements provides a model which makes explicit the considerations on which we depend. Because such a theory would be adequate for the purpose of interpreting others it is sufficient to yield an account of the meaning of the language they use.

This position was famously criticized by Michael Dummett,⁵² who argued that it was too 'modest' in that it failed to provide a satisfactory account of a speaker's understanding of their own language. Dummett's point can be expressed in terms of Frege's distinction between sense and reference (see Section 3.1): according to Dummett, Davidson's account of meaning is only an account of reference and omits the element of sense which is essential if one is to capture the way in which the speaker understands the language. Dummett then goes on to argue, in a way which departs from Frege (as he acknowledges), that an account of sense requires one to include within one's theory of meaning for a language sufficient detail to generate a specification of the kinds of evidence whose recognition speakers treat as warranting the assertion of appropriate sentences of the language. For Dummett, therefore, the primary goal of a theory of meaning should be an account of the 'ascribability-conditions' of the sentences of the language, although by adding what it is that these conditions are evidence of it should also be possible to arrive at an account of the truth-conditions of the sentences and thereby provide a specification of their meaning.

This position resembles the verificationist account of meaning advanced by the logical empiricists, and it is therefore vulnerable to some of the criticisms which

⁵¹ In his 1997 paper 'Indeterminism and Antirealism', reprinted in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001, Davidson explains why he takes it that, nonetheless, an element of 'Quine's reference, I am not persuaded by Davidson on this point but I shall not pursue it here.

⁵² Dummett first articulated this criticism in his papers 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)' (1975) and 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)' (1976), both of which are reprinted in *The Seas of Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993. For a later statement of the criticism, see *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, Duckworth, London, 1991, esp. ch. 5.

arise from discussions of that position, in particular the objection that because the evidence for or against a statement is indefinitely complex and depends on a range of intersecting beliefs and hypotheses, the position leads back to Quine's sceptical conclusion that sentences have no definite meaning by themselves. Dummett responds to this criticism by drawing a distinction between the 'canonical evidence' ('criterion') for the application of a concept, knowledge of which he takes to be a prerequisite for understanding, and evidence which is only indirectly relevant in the light of other assumptions. Hence, he maintains, it is possible to provide determinate assertibility-conditions for individual sentences, based on the canonical evidence which defines the concepts employed there. But Dummett's critics argue that this response fails to acknowledge the inescapable pragmatism inherent in the relationship between evidence, assumptions and hypotheses identified by Duhem, Carnap and Quine; and once one looks at the ways in which scientific concepts alter in the face of new kinds of evidence it is hard to retain confidence in the conception of some distinctively canonical evidence which defines these concepts. Adapting Quine's remark about conventionality, quoted earlier, the truth is that 'canonical status is a passing trait, significant at the moving front of science but useless in classifying evidence behind the lines. It is a trait of events and not of evidence.'

However even if Dummett's own proposal for a theory of meaning is for this reason problematic, the question as to whether he succeeded in identifying a serious weakness in Davidson's philosophy of language remains to be addressed. As Dummett has acknowledged, the way in which Davidson defines the adequacy of a theory of truth in terms of the procedure of radical interpretation shows that the notion of evidence does in fact play an important role in Davidson's position. Although this role does not imply that an adequate theory of truth is based on a theory of canonical evidence, Davidson argues that it does imply that such a theory of truth can play the role of a theory of sense. For it implies that it is only that systematic account of the truth-conditions of the sentences of the language (and thus also of the reference of the words of the language) which meets the combined requirements of charity and humanity which provides a specification of their meaning. So, contrary to Dummett's charge, for Davidson, meaning is not just a matter of reference and truth-conditions if this is understood to imply that any specification of the truth-conditions of a sentence, or of the reference of a term, provides an account of its meaning. Instead, Davidson's method of radical interpretation yields privileged specifications of truth-conditions which show the sense of the terms in question. Hence Davidson's position does, after all, accommodate both sense and reference.

Davidson's position became the established philosophy of language for the last quarter of the twentieth century. Many of those who accepted it, however, did not accept all the ways in which he proceeded to develop it, and it is worth looking briefly at some of these points since they illustrate one way in which the philosophy of language has remained central to philosophical debate. A good case to start with is Davidson's account of first person authority, the epistemic authority we accord

to a thinker concerning what it is that he thinks or feels. In Russell's work at the start of the twentieth century this authority was thought of as deriving from the immediate acquaintance we each have with our own thoughts and feelings, a kind of acquaintance which we do not have with the thoughts and feelings of others. This conception of acquaintance was effectively criticized by later philosophers such as Neurath on the grounds that it treats the conceptualization and recognition of thoughts and feelings as if it were just a matter of having them; as a result many philosophers came to doubt the very idea of first person authority or to argue that it should be re-interpreted as a mistaken interpretation of the distinctive role of a subject who makes it true that he has a thought by avowing it, for example, by saying 'I intend to go to New York tomorrow'.⁵³ For Davidson, however, the way to approach the issue is to go back to the situation of the linguist who seeks to understand someone ('the native') whose language she does not understand. For in this situation, Davidson argues, the linguist has no choice but to start from the presumption that the native's utterances express thoughts which the native knows that he bas. For the linguist can only interpret the native insofar as she starts from the presumption that the native's utterances are intelligible in the light of the native's own understanding of them, for example that the native knows what he is doing when he says 'I intend to go to New York tomorrow'. So the hypothesis that the native does not generally know what he is thinking when he speaks will undermine the possibility of interpretation by implying that the native's behaviour is largely unintelligible.⁵⁴

Davidson's discussion of this point connects with the claim that thought and language are intimately related, so much so that one cannot have thoughts without a language which others can interpret. This is probably the most controversial aspect of his philosophy since it implies that the ascription of thoughts (such as beliefs and desires) to brute animals is a mistake. Davidson bases his position on the claim that thoughts belong within networks linked by inferential connections and that one cannot make the relevant inferences without the capacity to recognize that one has the thoughts in question. For example, he suggests, in being surprised by what one sees, one is recognizing that one sees conflicts with what one has believed. He further argues that this capacity to recognize one's own thoughts depends on the ability to distinguish between how things are and how one thinks that they are, and that this ability requires the capacity to communicate with others who show one the need to make this distinction for oneself in just the way that one makes it with respect to them. The first part of this argument, which ties the capacity for thought to the capacity for self-conscious rational inference can be questioned; critics argue that simple thoughts, and even capacities such as that for surprise, can be linked by causal dispositions which do not require the higher-order thoughts Davidson demands.

⁵³ This position was famously advanced by Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963, p. 175.
⁵⁴ See D. Davidson 'First Person Authority' (1984), reprinted in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001.

If the critics are right (as I think they are), then thought and language need not be as interdependent as Davidson maintains. But this point can be detached from the second part of Davidson's argument, according to which the capacity for self-consciously objective thought depends on language. This is a thesis which Davidson came to call his 'triangulation' thesis: thinkers get their conception of an objective world, a world distinct from anyone's subjective conception of it, including their own, by recognizing through the ways in which they understand what others are saying about them that because those others apply to them the distinction which they themselves draw with respect to others between their thoughts and the world, there is a general distinction between the world and anyone's thoughts about it. So objective thought depends upon the intersubjectivity of language. The opposite also holds: intersubjective communication depends on the possibility of interpreters making sense of each other within a world which they take to be independent of the perspectives of each speaker, that is, within a world which they take to be objective. Thus the triangle 'Self/Other/World' is fundamental to the possibility both of intersubjective communication and objective thought, and it is language which forms the base of this triangle, the connection between oneself and others.⁵⁵

Davidson's work shows clearly how philosophy of language remains central to philosophical debate at the end of the twentieth century, though it does not have quite the foundational role within philosophy that Dummett had in mind when praising Frege's revolutionary insights at the start of the century. Before moving on, however, there is one final twist in the tale to add, namely Davidson's sceptical thesis that 'there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed'.⁵⁶ This thesis, which is distinctive of Davidson's late writings, seems paradoxical from someone whose philosophy depends on his philosophy of 'language' in the ways I have intimated. But the qualification in the passage cited is crucial: Davidson is just rejecting the conception of language that was characteristic of the logical empiricists and their successors, the conception of language as a network of conventional rules which speakers tacitly invoke as they seek to communicate their thoughts to their audience.⁵⁷ A classic formulation of this position had been presented in 1969 by David Lewis.⁵⁸ Lewis had started by developing an insight of Hume's, that conventions of any kind can emerge where there are regularities in behaviour which are recognized as providing solutions to problems of social coordination. For these regularities acquire the status of conventions once they give rise to mutual expectations about the intentions with which this

⁵⁵ See D. Davidson, 'Rational Animals' (1982), reprinted in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 105.

⁵⁶ D. Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' (1986), reprinted in *Truth, Language and History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 107.

⁵⁷ Davidson emphasizes that his scepticism is primarily directed at philosophical, and not ordinary, conceptions of language in 'The Social Aspect of Language' (1994), reprinted in *Truth, Language and History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005.

⁵⁸ D. Lewis, *Convention*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1969.

behaviour is initiated. Lewis then argued that since linguistic behaviour provides a solution to the problem of coordinating the beliefs and actions of different people by providing a way of communicating to each other their beliefs, commands, wishes and so on, language is a network of communicative conventions of this kind. Although this proposal provides a prima facie plausible general account of the evolution of linguistic behaviour,⁵⁹ Davidson argues it leads one to expect much greater uniformity of linguistic practice than one actually finds: he argues that we all have our own personal idiosyncrasies and when we speak with others we constantly adjust our vocabulary and syntax in order to facilitate communication without much attention to conventional rules. A compromise suggestion might be that in learning a language one is initiated into a network of default conventions from which one can later detach oneself for the purposes of humour or local circumstances; but Davidson rejects this too. According to Davidson, therefore, communication and understanding are essentially practical skills whose exercise varies from context to context; they do not draw on any familiarity with a shared set of general conventions whose function would be to act as 'a portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance'.⁶⁰

I return below to the issue of context-specific considerations which Davidson emphasizes here. But one might well ask here whether this new emphasis on the piecemeal interpretation of personal idiosyncrasies is consistent with his earlier account of radical interpretation with its emphasis on the construction of a systematic theory of truth for a language. In part Davidson's response to this will be to observe that he had always maintained that his account of radical interpretation was always conceived to be just a theoretical model to illustrate the considerations which have a role in a theory of meaning; it was never his view that speakers actually proceed as radical interpreters of this kind. Yet this does not explain why radical interpretation is a good model of linguistic communication if this is as context specific and unsystematic as he maintains in his later work; and I think that, as he himself intimates, his views did change on this matter over the course of his career. Whether this was a change for the better remains a matter of dispute, but one aspect of this final position is worth further notice: Davidson came to think that nothing in the linguistic practices of speakers and their audience must be shared—'meaning something requires that by and large one follows a practice of one's own, a practice that can be understood by others. But there is no fundamental reason why practices must be shared'.⁶¹ This thesis certainly puts him at odds with most philosophers of language of the twentieth century; as Davidson himself notes, it is a significant disagreement with Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language, to which I now turn.

⁵⁹ This approach is developed in detail by Jonathan Bennett in *Linguistic Behaviour*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, esp. ch. 7.
⁶⁰ A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs, note 53, p. 107.
⁶¹ D. Davidson, 'The Social Aspect of Language' (1994), reprinted in *Truth, Language and History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 125.

3.7 WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS

At the time of the publication in 1921 of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein believed that it provided final solutions to the problems of philosophy. By 1930 he had revised this judgement, and during the following decade he worked on a new series of philosophical 'investigations' which, by 1945, he had distilled into a manuscript which we know as part I of his *Philosophical Investigations*. This was published posthumously in 1953, along with some later reflections that he was not able to integrate into the earlier manuscript as he had intended and which now appear as Part II of the book.

I have chosen to discuss this later work of Wittgenstein's out of historical sequence mainly because doing otherwise would have interrupted the narrative I have hitherto constructed; but there is also a sense in which it is particularly towards the end of the twentieth century that the issues he discusses here concerning the way in which our ordinary everyday language should be understood have come to be salient within the philosophy of language. Nonetheless, as he himself suggests, the best way to approach this book is by comparing it with his earlier one, the *Tractatus*. As before, philosophy is conceived as a critique of language, or rather, as he now puts it: 'Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' (I: §109). So philosophy is essentially an activity which aims, as before, at clarity, the kind of clarity which brings 'peace' because 'philosophical problems completely disappear' (I: §133), a result to be attained by an investigation which transforms disguised nonsense into patent nonsense (I: §464). This kind of philosophical investigation is therefore 'grammatical' (I: §90); and since its primary aim is to clear away misunderstandings it is an essentially descriptive inquiry which does not seek to advance any positive theses; instead 'it leaves everything as it is' (I: §124).

So far the only apparent contrast with the *Tractatus* is the substitution of a concern with grammar for his earlier emphasis on logic. This might seem to be just a difference of idiom, but it signals the fact that Wittgenstein has come to reject the conception of representation invoked in the *Tractatus* according to which the possibility of meaningful language was supposed to depend at a fundamental level upon the use of basic, logically independent, sentences involving simple names of things. Wittgenstein now takes that belief to rest on a misguided presumption that there is a single essence for language which is most clearly manifested by the use of language in the exact sciences where one might indeed hope to find some such sentences dealing with basic physical parameters. Hence he begins his *Philosophical Investigations* with an invitation to his readers to stand back and consider the huge variety of ways in which language is in fact used (I: §23), most of which tolerate vagueness and a lack of precision. So the kind of clarity he now seeks in order to bring an end to philosophical dispute is not that which arises from a logical analysis of ordinary language undertaken in order to identify basic sentences and simple names on which language is thought to depend. Instead the kind of 'perspicuous representation' he now seeks

(1: §122) involves careful descriptions of the 'grammar' of ordinary language whose aim is to exhibit both the implications inherent in our actual use of language and the external conditions under which these uses of language make sense, including points which we normally take for granted because they are too familiar for us to think them worthy of notice. Since philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of our ordinary everyday language, it is that language which needs to be understood properly as it is, and not by reference to a misguided conception of how it has to be:

When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? Then how is another one to be constructed? (1: §120)

This turn to ordinary language for its own sake was not entirely new: G. B. Moore's late writings about knowledge and certainty, for example, had already pointed in the same direction.⁴² Wittgenstein's emphatic affirmation of the value of the ordinary nonetheless marks a striking change of direction when considered in the light of the tradition I have so far been discussing. As I have indicated, one aspect of this change is a turn from the implicit monism of that tradition which treats the language of the exact natural sciences as the fundamental model of meaning to an open-ended pluralism which recognizes a variety of different 'language-games', as Wittgenstein calls our meaningful practices in which language and conduct are interwoven (one can also think of this as a radicalization of Carnap's tolerant attitude to variety among logical systems—see Section 3.4). Wittgenstein holds that different language-games have their own distinctive grammars, and we do not need to suppose that these differences are in principle to be regulated by some master language-game; instead coherence is to be achieved by piecemeal inquiries, by understanding and noting differences, so that once we have characterized a particular language-game there will come a point where our investigations can cease and we can say 'this language-game is played' (1: §654). In this later period, therefore, Wittgenstein was particularly hostile to the presumption that all language-games are answerable to the natural sciences, and in the very last section of Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* he lays stress against the 'conceptual confusion' which afflicts psychology as a result of this presumption (II: §xiv).

Despite this emphasis on the irreducible variety of language-games, Wittgenstein does make one general point about language-games, namely that they all involve the following of 'rules', though since he argues that there is no single essence of 'game' (1: §67), it would be a mistake to think of 'rule-following' as some single fundamental structure. Nonetheless since he says that rules determine what is, or is not, to count as the same (1: §225), the implication is that all language-games involve judgments of some kind about what is the same or different and that their rules provide the concepts which are employed in these judgments. Wittgenstein then makes two key points. First, if one is engaged in a game of any kind, including a language-game, it

⁴² See, for example, Moore's paper, 'Four Forms of Scepticism', which dates from the 1940s and is reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1959.

must be possible to mistake the application of a rule. This point is clear in the case of classification: it only makes sense to suppose that someone is classifying objects in some way if the person involved can make a mistake in doing so. Secondly, he observes that any statement of a rule can be interpreted in such a way that what looks like a mistake when the rule is applied to a new case is actually in accordance with the rule. If we are doing arithmetic and the rule is simply 'add 2', someone who has been trained successfully in the application of the rule to numbers less than 1000 but then gives the answer '1004' when told to 'add 2' to 1000 can provide a deviant interpretation of the operation of addition which justifies their answer (I: §185). Hence, Wittgenstein suggests, there is a 'paradox' here: 'no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule' (I: §201). (See George Wilson, 'Rule Following, Meaning, and Normativity,' Ch. 7. this volume.)

Wittgenstein infers from this that following a rule is not just a matter of acting in accordance with an explicit instruction, or indeed a rule-hook, since their interpretation is inescapably indeterminate. Instead, he suggests, the way to understand the situation is to start from our natural capacity to note similarities and draw distinctions; what then needs explanation is the way in which the exercise of this capacity counts as following a rule by allowing for the possibility of our making a mistake, the possibility, that is, that our actual judgement differs from that which is appropriate to the circumstances in the light of the rules, the concepts, employed in the judgement. As we have seen, it is no good looking to instructions or precedents by themselves to identify the rule; and Wittgenstein is equally insistent that it is no good imagining that an agent's subjective impressions, such as visual imagery, can identify a rule where these external facts fail. Instead his proposal is that we have to put all these materials in the context of the games which are regulated by the rules in question, and let the rules be identified through the common practices of those who participate, which will of course include reference to rule-books and precedents (I: §199). So where language is involved, the rules which characterize the concepts expressed are those manifested by the practices of the speakers engaged in the language-game in question, which will include the cases which are picked out as paradigms, the types of evidence taken to be relevant, the authority of different speakers, the general point of the language-game and the implications, both theoretical and practical, taken to follow from some judgement.

Just exactly what this involves, and whether it is correct, remain matters of much dispute.⁶³ A key question is how it is that these practices can define a rule when examples, rule-books etc, are by themselves inadequate. Wittgenstein gives his answer to this question through his descriptions of a great variety of language-games in the first hundred sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*—the answer summed up in the slogan 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language' (I: §43); I shall not

⁶³ Saul Kripke's discussion of this aspect of Wittgenstein's work has been especially influential and controversial: see S. A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1982.

pursue the matter here. But an important implication of Wittgenstein's position is expressed by his remark that we have rules only where there is agreement (I: §224); for this implies that language must be shared, a point which, as we have seen (§7), is denied by Davidson. Nonetheless Wittgenstein denies that truth itself is ever just a matter of agreement among speakers (I: §241). So Wittgenstein, like Quine (see §6), rejects the idea of 'truth by convention', even concerning what one might suppose to be 'a priori' principles of a language-game. As he explains in his notes *On Certainty*,⁶⁴ even where a presumption, such as that the earth has existed for very many years, has a special status in our ways of gathering and assessing evidence so that it functions like a river-bed along which the stream of ordinary thought can flow, we still allow that it can itself be called in question—'the river-bed of my thoughts may shift' (*On Certainty* §97). But one point which Wittgenstein does take from his discussion of rule-following is that because this is essentially a practice, there cannot be 'private rules' (I: §202). What this means becomes clear when Wittgenstein invites his readers to consider the hypothesis that someone might employ a 'private language' to classify his own 'immediate private sensations' in such a way that others cannot understand the language (I: §243). 'This would be a language employed by someone who classifies his sensations purely on the basis of his subjective experiences, of how he feels at the time, without relying on their physical causes or his subsequent behaviour, since facts of these two kinds would in principle permit others to understand his classifications. Wittgenstein does not explain the significance of this hypothesis, but the implication is that there is an important philosophical tradition which conceives of subjective experience, and consciousness in general, on the assumption that a private language of this kind is possible; and we have only to think of the works of Descartes to recognize this assumption in practice.

Wittgenstein argues that this hypothesis is empty, for the reason that the speaker's use of his 'language' does not constitute a rule-governed practice within which it makes sense to suppose that the speaker can make a mistake. For the basis of the speaker's classification of his sensations is to be just his subjective experiences, but, like all examples, taken individually these experiences do not by themselves determine what is to count as having the same type of sensation on some other occasion. Hence it follows that although, when he has a sensation, the speaker no doubt thinks of himself as classifying it in accordance with a rule he initiated on some earlier occasion, the only content for his current judgement that this is the same sensation as that which he had before is one fixed by his own current assessment of the subjective similarity between his present and his past experience; but since this assessment also constitutes his current judgement, the judgement is infallible. Yet that implies that the situation here is such that he cannot make a mistake, and thus that no judgement is actually being made; as Wittgenstein puts it, 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right"' (I: §258).

As with his rule-following argument, it remains a matter of dispute just what this argument implies, especially concerning 'Robinson Crusoe'-type situations in which

⁶⁴ *On Certainty*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1969.

individual thinkers are *de facto* isolated, but I shall not pursue the matter here.⁶⁵ Instead I want to briefly indicate the way in which he uses his new philosophy of language (if one can so speak) to offer a new way of thinking about psychological concepts. As we have seen, Wittgenstein holds that our conception of psychological states has to include reference to the situations which prompt them and to the behaviour to which they give rise; but he is no physicalist or behaviourist, although he is often misrepresented as such. For these positions do not provide for the special role of first-person judgements which he takes to be distinctive of psychological concepts.⁶⁶ This may appear a surprising point for him to insist upon, since it might be thought to lead back to the position of the Cartesian philosophers whom he has criticized because of their assumption about the essential privacy of consciousness. But his claim is not that there is no phenomenon of first-person authority with respect to the mind; only that it has been radically misunderstood by those who think of sensations and other mental states as inner states with essential features which are privately presented to the subject. And the deep mistake here, he suggests, is a failure on all sides to appreciate properly the distinctively non-descriptive grammar of the language-games in which we employ psychological concepts (I: §304). The Cartesian recognizes the phenomenon of first-person authority, but because he construes the language-game as essentially descriptive he misconstrues the phenomenon in terms of epistemological privacy; the behaviourist and physicalist rightly reject privacy, but because they too assume that psychological concepts are just used to describe states and processes, they fail to acknowledge first-person authority at all. Wittgenstein's claim, then, is that we need a new approach, one which involves 'a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please' (I: §304).

Wittgenstein goes on to offer several suggestions of this kind, embodying different accounts of the role of different first-person judgements. In the case of expressions of intention, decision and the like, he suggests, the special position of the speaker simply reflects the fact that expressing our own intentions and decisions is a way of making up our mind what to do in the first place or of reaffirming our plans.⁶⁷ So our authority here is in the first instance practical, a matter of our own responsibility for ourselves, and only derivatively epistemological. In the case of sensations such as pain Wittgenstein's suggestion is that what is distinctive about a speaker's first-person judgements ('It hurts', 'I am in pain') is that they are expressions of pain; so instead of thinking of their authority as dependent upon the speaker's unique ability to recognize his own sensations, they should be seen as a conceptualization of the

⁶⁵ Wittgenstein discussed Robinson Crusoe-type situations in lectures given in 1934–5, and his lecture notes are included in the collection *Philosophical Occasions* (eds. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1993); see esp. p. 237. For a good general discussion of the 'private language argument' see M. Budd, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology*, Routledge, London, 1989.

⁶⁶ Wittgenstein's clearest statement of this point is in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. II (Blackwell, Oxford, 1980), §63. But it is implicit in the latter part of his *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁶⁷ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. II §275–6.

involuntary expressions of pain ('Ow!') which provide us with our basic evidence for in his first-person judgements about himself, is dependent upon an ability to make judgements about himself and others that are appropriate to these other kinds of evidence and to their implications (i: 5310). Finally, Wittgenstein draws on an observation made by Moore concerning the special status of first-person expressions of belief, namely that it is nonsensical for me to say 'I believe that it is raining, though it is not raining' even though others can sensibly point out that I am mistaken. Again, the special status of these first-person expressions of belief is not a matter of epistemological privilege; instead, Wittgenstein suggests, they reflect the fact that it is a mark of the language-game of belief that I express my beliefs by saying 'I believe that it is raining' just as much as by saying 'It is raining' (ii: §x).

These cases show Wittgenstein's new pluralist approach to the 'grammar' of ordinary language at work. Whether or not one accepts all the details of his account, — and it is interesting to compare his approach and conclusions with of Davidson which I described above (Section 3.6), — I think it is indisputable that Wittgenstein's investigations of psychological concepts exemplify a new and fruitful way in which the philosophy of language has contributed to the philosophy of mind.

3.8 ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

Wittgenstein's emphasis in these later writings on the grammar of our ordinary language-games was part of a broader turn to 'ordinary language', which reached its zenith in the work of the three major Oxford philosophers of the early post-1945 period, Gilbert Ryle, John Austin and Peter Strawson. In different ways, they all took it that there are implications in our ordinary uses of language which are of central importance for an understanding of the concepts we employ but which have often been neglected in philosophical discussion of these concepts.

Ryle was the oldest of this trio and, having been on friendly terms with Wittgenstein during the 1930s, was familiar with his new approach to philosophy.⁶⁸ In presenting this approach, however, Ryle retained the word 'logic' to describe the implications inherent in the ordinary use of language while insisting that this logic of ordinary language is essentially informal: 'the logic of everyday statements . . . cannot in principle be adequately represented by the formulae of formal logic'.⁶⁹ But it is a fair criticism of Ryle that his account of this 'logic' is altogether too unstructured to be persuasive. A characteristic case is provided by his discussion of the freedom

⁶⁸ See R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1990, p. 275. Monk tells the story how, when asked how many people understood his philosophy, Wittgenstein replied 'Two — and one of them is Gilbert Ryle', p. 436.

⁶⁹ 'Ordinary Language' (1953), reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, Hutchinson, London, 1971, p. 316.

of the will in *The Concept of Mind*.⁷⁰ Ryle starts by maintaining that 'In their most ordinary employment "voluntary" and "involuntary" are used, with a few minor elasticities, as adjectives applying to actions which ought not to be done' (p. 67). So 'In this ordinary use, then, it is absurd to discuss whether satisfactory, correct or admirable performances are voluntary or involuntary' (p. 68). But philosophers have not heeded this constraint, with the result that 'The tangle of largely spurious problems, known as the Freedom of the Will, partly derives from this unconsciously stretched use of "voluntary"' (p. 69). Ryle here moves too quickly from the linguistic phenomena he adduces uncritically to his conclusion. To say this is not to say that we require a formal logic to identify the implications inherent in ordinary language; but what is needed is a critical discussion, if not a theory, which enables one to distinguish different kinds of implication and to assess what significance they have, if any.

Austin's work can be seen as providing part of this critical discussion. His paper 'A Plea for Excuses' covers some of the same ground as Ryle's brisk discussion of the voluntary, but now with an unsurpassed ear for the implications inherent in the different idioms employed in discussions of responsibility.⁷¹ Yet Austin qualifies the significance of appeals to ordinary language: it is not, he says, the 'Last Word', since the distinctions it employs may incorporate old errors or fail to take account of new discoveries which rely on 'the resources of the microscope and its successors'.⁷² Nonetheless, because it is the 'first word' its implications should help us to call into question the ways in which philosophical issues have been approached—Austin remarks that his interest in excuses was prompted by dissatisfaction with traditional discussions of free will.⁷³ But Austin's contribution went well beyond this kind of critical scrutiny of Ryle's appeal to the logic of ordinary language. For starting from his account of utterances such as 'I promise' as 'performative utterances' through which we make promises rather than simply describe them, Austin was led to develop a theory of speech acts, of the things which we do by our utterances.⁷⁴ I shall not try to describe this theory, but there are two aspects of it that merit brief notice. First, Austin's emphasis on the variety of things which we do with language and his attempt to characterize this variety in some detail can be seen as a way of developing Wittgenstein's emphasis on the variety of our language-games. They share the view that one of the characteristic mistakes of philosophy has been to think that language is fundamentally descriptive; and they also agree that one of the best ways to identify this mistake is to attend to verbs whose first-person present tense use is in some respects different from that of other uses of the verb, though Austin shows that this is by no means a distinctive characteristic of psychological verbs. Second, Austin discusses at

⁷⁰ *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson, London, 1949; page references are to the 1963 edition published by Penguin, Harmondsworth.

⁷¹ 'A Plea for Excuses' (1956), reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2nd edn, 1970.

⁷² *Ibid.*, note 71, p. 185.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, note 71, p. 180.

⁷⁴ Austin set out his position in his 1955 William James lectures which were published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. Urmson, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962.

length the different ways in which a speaker's putative performance of a speech act is 'to some extent a failure', or, as he says, 'infelicitous'.⁷⁵ Since the successful performance of a speech-act will be one which avoids these infelicities, it follows that Austin's account of this matter is an important contribution to disentangling Ryle's undifferentiated conception of the implications inherent in the use of ordinary language.

A different contribution to this task had been made a few years earlier by Strawson. Strawson began his career by taking the case for ordinary language right into the enemy camp, the study of formal logic. In his 1952 *Introduction to Logical Theory* he affirmed that alongside the study of formal logic there is 'the study of the logical features of ordinary speech' which is much more complex than formal logic, for it involves logical relations beyond those of entailment and contradiction, but, he concludes, 'it is none the less true that the logic of ordinary speech provides a field of intellectual study unsurpassed in richness, complexity, and the power to absorb'.⁷⁶ Strawson had begun his argument for this conclusion two years earlier when he published 'On Referring',⁷⁷ his famous critical study of Russell's theory of descriptions (see Section 3.2). 'The core of Strawson's critique of Russell was that Russell's theory fails to do justice to the way in which we use definite descriptions to refer to things. Strawson argues that reference is a fundamental linguistic act, one whereby we identify, or single out, some one thing which we can then go on to describe, and he emphasizes the role of the context of utterance in enabling the speaker to identify the thing he is talking about. This point is central to his criticism of Russell. For, Strawson argued, because he failed to appreciate the role of context, Russell took it that reference could be achieved only by names which were guaranteed to single out one and the same object in any context, which Russell called 'logically proper names'. Since definite descriptions fail this requirement, it was inevitable that Russell should construe them as merely descriptive; but, Strawson argued, this was a mistake. Russell's conception of a logically proper name is illusory and once the contribution of context to determining reference is correctly understood, Strawson argued, there is no reason to deny that in utterances of a sentence such as 'The table is covered with books' the phrase 'the table' is being used by the speaker to refer to some one table which he believes to be identifiable in the context, so that the statement made by this utterance is true if that table is covered with books and false if it is not. Strawson further claimed that where there is in fact no table which can be identified from the context of utterance, the question of the truth and falsity of the speaker's statement does not arise since the speaker's use of the sentence to make a statement is 'spurious'; no statement is in fact made. So that there is such a table is something which is 'implied' by the speaker's success in making a statement at all, true or false. It is this type of implication that Strawson had in mind when he wrote in the *Introduction to Logical Theory* of logical relations beyond entailment, and he here calls it 'presupposition', which is how it is now commonly described.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Introduction to Logical Theory*, note 76, p. 175.

⁷⁶ 'On Referring' (1950), reprinted in his *Logical-Philosophical Papers*, Methuen, London, 1971.

⁷⁷ *Introduction to Logical Theory*, Methuen, London, 1952, pp. 231-2.

⁷⁸ *How to Do Things with Words*, note 74, p. 14.

Subsequent discussion has refined many of the points at issue between Strawson and Russell. On one side, Kripke's distinction between rigid and non-rigid designators supports a general distinction between names and definite descriptions which counts in favour of Russell's approach;⁷⁹ on the other side, the role of context in determining the reference of phrases with demonstratives is now well understood and readily incorporates descriptions conceived in the way that Strawson proposed.⁸⁰ At the same time however other ways of thinking about the issue have been developed with the result that the debate now has many more than two sides and I shall not pursue it further here.⁸¹ Instead I want to turn back to the very idea of ordinary language philosophy and discuss some of the issues it raised for the philosophy of language, in particular the question as to whether an account of meaning should take a concern with the conditions under which what is said is true as fundamental. The tradition I described in the first parts of this chapter, running from Frege to Davidson (Section 3.1–3.6), did take this view—hence the attention throughout to truth-conditions, but this presumption is called into question by the philosophers of ordinary language. For it is central to their approach that meaning encompasses a great variety of implications which extend well beyond those which are grounded in questions of truth and falsity. One response to this challenge would be to say that it was never part of the truth-conditional tradition to hold that the emphasis on truth was exhaustive of meaning: Frege's conception of the 'tone' of an expression such as 'but', for example, was precisely intended to capture implications arising from its use which are not inherent in the truth-conditions of sentences in which it occurs. But this does not meet the point; for the ordinary language philosophers deny that in the characterization of meaning priority is to be given to those aspects of meaning which give rise to questions of truth and falsity. To accept this priority is to assume that language is basically descriptive—the assumption which Wittgenstein and Austin reject.

At this point (c. 1960) in the development of the philosophy of language, therefore, there was an opportunity for a sustained debate about the role of truth in the determination of meaning. The issue was raised in 1957 by Stanley Cavell, who had studied with Austin and been deeply influenced by his own study of Wittgenstein, in a famous paper 'Must We Mean What We Say?';⁸² and Strawson later devoted his 1969 inaugural lecture 'Meaning and Truth' to this question, describing it as a 'Homeric struggle' between the protagonists of a truth-conditional approach and the ordinary language philosophers who emphasized instead the primacy of speech and communication, amongst whom he not surprisingly included himself.⁸³ Yet the debate did not really take off. Why not? Partly because Davidson's conception of radical interpretation (§7) provided a way of approaching the issue that combined an emphasis

⁷⁹ See S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1972.

⁸⁰ See R. Stalnaker, 'Pragmatic Presuppositions' (1974), reprinted in *Context and Content*, Oxford University Press, New York NY, 1999.

⁸¹ See the special centenary issue of *Mind* 114 (October 2005).

⁸² The original version of Cavell's paper was published in *Inquiry* 1 (1958). He later published a revised version in his collection *Must We Mean What We Say*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York NY, 1969.

⁸³ P. Strawson, 'Meaning and Truth' (1969), reprinted in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, Methuen, London, 1971; for the 'Homeric struggle' see p. 172.

on truth-conditions with sensitivity to the intentions and beliefs of speakers, and therefore seemed to provide a way of combining the approaches which Strawson sought to oppose. But the main reason the debate stalled derived from the work of a philosopher who belonged to the ordinary language tradition and yet propounded a subtle compromise which, at least for a time, defused the radical challenge posed by that tradition—Paul Grice.

Grice began his career in Oxford at a time when ordinary language philosophy was dominant and was being used to criticize traditional philosophical debates. Some of these uses were sophisticated, some less so; and Grice wanted to find a way of drawing distinctions between them. The position he first discussed was one to the effect that the book in question is red or that he thinks that it is not red; otherwise he would have said 'The book is red' instead. Hence, on this view, where these implications are not satisfied, the speaker's utterance says nothing true or false at all.⁴⁴ Clearly, if this is right, then traditional philosophical debates about appearance and reality are misconceived, since they assume that it makes sense to suppose that, for example, things that are red normally look red, and thus that one can describe how things appear to one without any implication of doubt or denial concerning the way they really are. Grice felt that these debates were indeed being cut off too quickly, and he argued, the critic here mistakes something which might well be implied in the course of a conversation for an implication which is either presupposed in Strawson's sense, as a condition of truth or falsity, or strictly implied by what is said. Implications of the first kind Grice called 'conversational implication', and one mark of them, as opposed to the others, is that a speaker can explicitly cancel them without any incoherence, e.g. in the case envisaged by saying 'The book looks red, and I have no doubt that it is red'.

Having introduced this distinction, Grice went on to develop a sophisticated account of conversational implication whose basic principle is that speakers normally seek to cooperate with their audience by saying things which are relevant to the context in which their conversation is taking place, and thus that there are many things which are in this way conversationally implicated by utterances without being part of what is strictly said. For example, if a colleague asks me how a student whom I am teaching is progressing and I just reply 'His handwriting is very clear', I thereby 'implicate' by my remark that the intellectual quality of his work is not good; but the implicature is just conversational, for I can obviously go on to cancel it without incoherence by adding 'and what he writes is very interesting'.⁴⁵ Through the plausibility of this account Grice succeeded in creating a broad consensus in favour of

⁴⁴ H. P. Grice, 'The Causal Theory of Perception' (1961), reprinted in part in his *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1989; see esp. pp. 227–8. The view being criticized had been advanced by A. Quinon in 'The Problem of Perception', *Mind*, 64 (1955), 28–51. Grice's argument does not apply to the very different way in which Austin criticized traditional discussions of appearance and reality in *Sense and Sensibilia* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962), esp. lectures vii, viii.

⁴⁵ See 'Logic and Conversation' (1967), reprinted in a revised version in *Studies in the Way of Words*, note 84.

the thesis that there is a clear distinction between conversational implicature, on the one hand, which is inherently dependent upon the speaker's wish to take advantage of the audience's ability to grasp what the speaker is trying to communicate by saying what he does in the light of the context of the conversation, and 'what is said', on the other hand, by the use of a sentence on some occasion, which Grice takes to be determined by general conventions governing the use of language, and which is therefore not dependent upon the conversational context in which the sentence occurs.

Grice went on to offer an account of meaning of this latter kind, what is said or 'literal meaning' as it is often called, in terms of a speaker's intention to induce within her audience a belief whose content identifies what is said through her intention that the audience should recognize from her utterance that she has the intention to induce the belief in question;⁸⁶ and David Lewis then showed that this account is precisely that which his own account of the conventional status of language would lead one to expect (see Section 3.6).⁸⁷ As we have seen, there are those, such as Davidson, who deny that language is in this way conventional; but this disagreement is not crucial here, for Davidson still subscribes to Grice's distinction between conversational implicature and literal meaning.⁸⁸ And as long as that distinction is retained, it is easy to argue that a concern with truth-conditions must retain a central place in the philosophy of language as a way of capturing what is said by the utterance of a sentence on some occasion. Thus precisely by his sensitivity to ordinary conversational uses of language Grice appeared to have defused the threat which ordinary language philosophy posed to traditional truth-oriented philosophy of language.⁸⁹

3.9 THINGS FALL APART

In recent years, however, the debate has been revived. Doubts about the Gricean compromise come from many directions. I will just indicate a few and will not attempt to resolve the issues thereby raised.

First, Strawson's doubts about the way in which standard systems of formal logic represent the logic of ordinary speech have become increasingly difficult to dismiss. A key focus of debate has been the understanding of conditionals, sentences of the form 'if *p*, then *q*'. As well as criticizing Russell's theory of descriptions in his *Introduction to Logical Theory* Strawson had also here criticized the standard truth-conditional treatment of the logic of conditionals on the grounds that focusing on

⁸⁶ See 'Meaning' (1957), reprinted in *Studies in the Way of Words*, note 84.

⁸⁷ See *Convention*, note 58, pp. 155–6.

⁸⁸ See 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' (1986), reprinted in *Truth, Language and History*, Clarendon, Oxford, 2005, p. 91.

⁸⁹ Of course not everyone was persuaded. A notable dissenter is Charles Travis; see *Unshadowed Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2001.

the truth or falsity of conditional sentences misrepresents their role in inference.⁹⁰ Grice responded to Strawson, arguing that once normal conversational implicature is brought into the discussion, the objections to the standard account can be set aside.⁹¹ But Grice's response did not end the debate, and an important new approach to conditionals was initiated by Ernest Adams, who argued that the best way to think about conditionals is to concentrate on the conditions under which their assertion is warranted, which Adams identified as situations in which there is a high probability of the truth of the consequent given the truth of the antecedent.⁹² This intuitively plausible claim then suggests that conditionals be thought of as propositions whose probability matches the conditional probability identified by Adams. But David Lewis proved that this cannot be: there can be no conditional proposition whose probability matches the conditional probability of the consequent given the antecedent.⁹³ This result suggests to some (though not to Lewis himself) that, for conditionals at any rate, truth-conditions are not the fundamental requirement for an account of meaning as the standard tradition supposes.⁹⁴ It is then a matter for further debate whether accepting this conclusion would be a serious challenge to the standard tradition; but it is certainly unattractive to find the truth-conditional approach to meaning strongly challenged on its home ground of logic.

A second area of unhappiness has developed around the significance of identity statements. Frege's famous discussion of the need to capture the cognitive value of the discovery expressed as 'The Morning Star is the Evening Star' and his suggestion that this is best accommodated by recognizing that names have sense as well as reference (see Section 3.1) have been the topic for sustained debate. Many philosophers, most notably Saul Kripke, have argued that it is a mistake to assign sense as well as handling the cognitive value of identity-statements which capture important discoveries.⁹⁵ But, it is also acknowledged, Grice's notion of conversational implicature is too weak for this task, since it is cancellable. Hence some further dimension of meaning seems required, one which captures the informational content conveyed by the utterance of a sentence in context but is less closely tied to truth-conditions than Frege's conception of sense. This issue has been sharpened by some further cases advanced by Jennifer Saul in which she tests our judgements concerning cases in which a person has two names which are associated with different roles which are supposed to be kept separate from each other: she focuses on our judgements about

⁹⁰ *Introduction to Logical Theory*, note 76, pp. 85 ff. Many other philosophers had expressed dissatisfaction about this matter, notably G. E. Moore and C. I. Lewis.
⁹¹ See 'Indicative Conditionals', in his *Studies in the Way of Words*, note 84.
⁹² E. Adams, *The Logic of Conditionals*, Dordrecht, 1975.
⁹³ D. Lewis, 'Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities' (1976), reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986.
⁹⁴ See D. Edgington, 'Do Conditionals have Truth-Conditions?' (1986), reprinted in *Conditionals*, ed. E. Jackson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.
⁹⁵ See M. M. F. Fregé, *Notion and Necessity*, note 79. For a good discussion of the issue here, see N. Salmon, *Frege's Puzzle*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1986.

Clark Kent/Superman. Even when we are familiar with this identity, she observes, we hesitate to accept inferences such as:

Superman leaps more tall buildings than Clark Kent

So: Superman leaps more tall buildings than Superman

Clark Kent went into a phone booth, and Superman came out

So: Clark Kent went into a phone booth, and Clark Kent came out

A Fregean strategy for vindicating our hesitation by interpreting the use of names here as expressive of a role, as 'Superman *qua* Superman' or 'Clark Kent *qua* Clark Kent', is counterintuitive when we think of our normal use of names. It certainly produces the wrong results if we think of a speaker who is uninformed about the identity. Equally, however, it is not clear how to handle our hesitations as just a matter of conversational implicature alone. Instead, as before, there seems to be some informational content which is conveyed by the use of the different names but which is neither a matter of 'what is said' nor of what is just conversationally implicated.⁹⁶

The concept that is often used to describe these contextual implications is 'pragmatics', so that the debate here is conceived as one about the respective merits of truth-conditional semantics versus informational pragmatics. In thinking about this debate it is important to acknowledge from the start that some of the ways in which context contributes to meaning are readily accommodated within a broad truth-conditional semantics; this applies particularly to the ways in which context of utterance fixes the reference of indexical and demonstrative expressions.⁹⁷ The issue, however, is how far this can be extended to apply to cases in which the contribution of context is of a rather different kind: rather than contributing suitable objects to what is said, the context enables communication to be successfully achieved despite the fact that speakers say things which are literally false. Thus, to take an example from a recent paper by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson,⁹⁸ suppose you offer me supper and I accept, saying 'Thanks, I haven't eaten.' On the face of it, what I say is false; but in the context what I communicate is that I have not yet eaten this evening. This phenomenon of 'loose talk' is ubiquitous in ordinary conversation, and we use our common sense all the time to understand each other without any need to correct or qualify our statements.⁹⁹ A first thought about it may be that one can construct conceptions of what is said such that the appearance of literal falsehood is dispelled by adding extra parameters and qualifications. In my judgement, however, the phenomena are too varied for this strategy to be persuasive.¹⁰⁰ An alternative line of thought is that what we have here are just Gricean conversational implicatures, and thus a

⁹⁶ Jennifer Saul, 'Substitution and Simple Sentences', *Analysis* (57), 1997.

⁹⁷ David Kaplan's work has shown how this is to be done; see his essay 'Demonstratives' in *Themes from Kaplan*, eds. J. Almog, H. Wettstein and J. Perry, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989.

⁹⁸ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, 'Truthfulness and Relevance', *Mind*, 111 (2002), pp. 583–632.

⁹⁹ The hero of Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher Boone, has Asperger's syndrome and cannot stand loose talk. As Mark Haddon shows, this makes conversations with him very unnatural and tedious.

¹⁰⁰ See François Recanatì, *Literary Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

phenomenon which is not a threat to truth-conditional semantics, but a complement to it. In fact, the phenomena here cannot all be captured by Grice's theory (e.g. the conversational implication that I haven't yet eaten this evening cannot be sensibly cancelled in the simple conversation above); but it is plausible to hold that an extended Gricean theory will do so.¹⁰¹ Once such a theory is seen to be effective, however, it poses a challenge of a different kind: namely that if what we want is an account of the basis of our understanding of each other, then truth-conditional semantics is not what is wanted. Instead we need an account of the way in which pragmatic skills are employed in conversational contexts to work out what is relevant for the purpose of communication with others. Sperber and Wilson put the point as follows:

Of course hearers expect to be informed and not misled by what is communicated; but what is communicated is not the same as what is said. Whatever genuine facts such a convention or maxim <sc. of truthfulness> was supposed to explain are better explained by assuming that communication is governed by a principle of relevance.¹⁰²

Sperber and Wilson suggest, then, that a pragmatic theory of communication can supplant, and not merely complement, truth-conditional semantics as the proper basis for a philosophy of language for the twenty-first century. And what then would be the proper place for semantics? I leave the last word on this with the greatest linguistic theorist of the twentieth century, Noam Chomsky: 'It is possible that natural language has only syntax and pragmatics.'¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cf. Sperber and Wilson 'Truthfulness and Relevance', note 98.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, note 98, p. 583.

¹⁰³ N. Chomsky, 'Language as a Natural Object' in *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 132.